

LOCAL NEWS: Rockford

Courthouse plans move forward

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ROCKFORD — Site and design development for a new federal courthouse in downtown Rockford can continue and include plans for a second bankruptcy courtroom thanks to an additional \$2 million in funding.

U.S. Rep. Don Manzullo, R-Egan, secured the money in a congressional appropriations bill included in the House-Senate conference report. The report is expected to be approved by the House and Senate next week.

Federal District Judge Philip G. Reinhard said the \$2 million will keep the project moving forward and eliminate worries that planning would stop because of a lack of funding sometime next year.

“This will get us over this hurdle,” Reinhard said. “It’s very difficult to obtain funds for these projects, so we are very appreciative of Congressman Manzullo’s special efforts at this stage.”

Plans for a new federal courthouse have been in the works for years, but the project’s first dose of funding didn’t come until 2001, when congress approved spending \$4.9 million for preliminary design work for the 120,000-square-foot facility. Total cost is estimated at \$42 million.

The next step will be obtaining construction funds. Reinhard hopes to get money to build in October 2004 or 2005. If that happens, the new courthouse could open its doors as soon as 2006 or 2007.

“The new federal courthouse is important not only to the federal judiciary but the people and workers of Rockford,” Manzullo said. “We could not let this project stall.”

Reinhard said the addition of a second bankruptcy courtroom to the new courthouse’s design was explored after a review of the court’s bankruptcy caseload.

“I understand that the numbers are up, and there will be a need for a second bankruptcy judge down the road,” he said.